

**Assistant Secretary Carson's Speech
at the African Diplomatic Corp's Celebration of Africa Day
Ritz Carlton Hotel
May 25, 2010
6:15 p.m.**

Good evening. I would like to thank the Organizing Committee for the kind invitation to speak here tonight. It is an honor for me and the Department of State to celebrate the 47th anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity. Africa Day is especially significant this year because many countries, including Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and most of francophone Africa, are also commemorating fifty years of independence from colonial rule.

This is an appropriate occasion to champion the positive ideals behind Africa's quest for independence and unity, but also soberly assess the tough challenges the continent continues to face. The United States was a strong advocate of African

independence, and today remains determined to support its African partners in dealing with these challenges. However, as I shall note in my remarks this evening, our ability to achieve our shared long-term goals of democracy, stability, and prosperity on the continent depends entirely on the integrity and effectiveness of African leadership.

In 1960, the world was struggling to break free of a violent and unjust past and to live by higher ideals and principles. Europe was still rebuilding from the Second World War, and much of it was two to three decades away from becoming fully democratic. The principles of self-determination and racial equality were only gradually gaining acceptance. Africa's independence at that time marked a major milestone in that struggle and a moment of great optimism. After nearly 80 years or more of colonial subjugation, most Africans were now free to govern themselves and become accepted actors on the

international stage. Self-rule took longer to achieve and cost more blood in a number of countries including South Africa, Zimbabwe, and the former Portuguese colonies, but the foundation for independent African nation states was firmly in place by 1960 and reinforced with the creation of the Organization of African Unity on this day three years later.

African independence has particular significance for the United States because of our interconnected histories and the principles of human rights and self-determination enshrined in the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence. A little over 12 percent of the U.S. population is of African descent, and many of our neighbors in the Caribbean and South America have large African diaspora populations. The exchange of political ideas between African nationalist movements and the civil rights movement in the United States date to at least the late nineteenth century. Religious, musical, cultural, and artistic

connections also run deep. Nobody embodies these connections more than our current president, who has drawn inspiration and wisdom from the experiences of his Kenyan father, as well as the struggle for civil rights in America.

Despite their inspirational beginnings, many African states did not have the best of leadership in the ensuing decades of independence. Individuals committed to fairness, integrity, and democratic nation building—such as Botswana’s first president Seretse Khama and Senegal’s first president Leopold Senghor—were exceptions. In most other cases, a range of factors including corruption, weak democratic institutions, authoritarianism, and ethnic chauvinism resulted in coups, military governments, armed conflict, human rights abuses, atrocities, and genocide.

Many African leaders violated the core human rights and sovereignty principles enshrined in the OAU charter, and some

treated their populations as badly if not worse than their colonial predecessors. Mismanagement, embezzlement of state revenues, and centralized approaches to economic management, precipitated economic decline and the deterioration of infrastructure and government services. Cold War rivalries also fueled conflict in countries such as Chad, Angola, and Mozambique.

Since the early 1990s, a growing number of African states have managed to stabilize themselves through varying combinations of improved leadership and international involvement. Although still encumbered by numerous problems, post-conflict states such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, and Angola are nonetheless at peace and in varying stages of recovery and democratic transition.

In Ghana, the government of Jerry Rawlings instituted economic reforms and gradually opened up to multiparty

democracy. Rawlings himself gracefully stepped down and handed power to an opposition government after completing his constitutionally authorized two terms. His successor, John Kuffuor, did likewise last year, handing power back to the opposition after his own party lost in narrow elections. In Mali, then General Amadou Toumani Toure handed power to an elected civilian government in 1992 after having ousted an authoritarian military regime the year before. His successor Alpha Omar Konare stepped down ten years later after serving his constitutionally authorized two terms. Benin and Senegal have also benefited from the willingness of their leaders to respect constitutional mandates and elections that turn them out of office.

In South Africa, Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk defied expectations of a racial civil war by peacefully negotiating an end to apartheid between 1990 and 1994. Mandela defused

racial tensions and voluntarily stepped down after only one term. His successor, Thabo Mbeki, accepted political defeat and resigned in 2008 just before the end of his second term after being recalled by his party.

In the economic sphere, we have also seen notable progress in many parts of Africa, with almost a decade of sustained growth prior to the onset of the global financial crisis. Over the past two decades, Mauritius, Ghana, Rwanda, Botswana, Tanzania, Uganda, and Cape Verde have liberalized their economies, embraced market reforms, and adopted pro-business policies, including reducing the time it takes to start a business.

Though significant, these and other improvements are measured against very low points in Africa's past. In my view, the continent as a whole has yet to overcome challenges that prevent it from realizing its full potential as was envisioned at independence. Some countries are drifting back towards

authoritarianism as the political space becomes more constrained and civil society and opposition groups experience increasing intimidation. Over the past two years, Mauritania, Guinea, Niger, and Madagascar have experienced military coups. Cote d'Ivoire has not had a presidential election since 2000 and continues to postpone the electoral process. The Central African Republic recently suspended planned elections because of lack of preparation. Nigeria, whose elections in 2007 were the most fraudulent and disorganized in the country's history, has not yet implemented the necessary reforms to hold good elections next year. In Zimbabwe, ruling ZANU-PF government officials continue to hinder democracy through harassment of the opposition and civil society and failure to honor their obligations to open the political space as called for in the Global Political Agreement.

Despite the economic growth I cited earlier, Africa's share of global GDP last year was only about 1.6 percent and its share of global trade is down to about 1.8 percent from its historic high of 3 percent in 1976. Life expectancy is about 51 years, compared to 64 years for South Asia and 68 for Arab States. In most cases, Africa's tremendous wealth in natural resources has not translated into greater prosperity for its people. Africa faces a massive digital divide with the rest of the world, which further inhibits the ability of African companies to compete on the global stage. Every year, the brain drain siphons off many of Africa's best and brightest professionals, further damaging competitiveness.

Though greatly reduced compared to the 1990s, conflict continues to inflict high humanitarian costs in some parts of Africa, particularly Somalia, Darfur, and eastern DRC. The Lord's Resistance Army continue to operate across national

borders, fomenting instability, terrorizing villages, abducting women and children, and committing atrocities. Periodic eruptions of communal violence in Nigeria and clashes between rival militias in Southern Sudan are indicative of underlying tensions that could escalate into more intense and sustained conflict if not dealt with effectively.

In his speech last summer in Accra, President Obama was clear that the United States stands with our African partners as they seek to confront these challenges. In the area of good governance and democracy, we intend to work with the international community and civil society to strengthen democratic institutions, including independent elections commissions, and preserve the democratic gains made in recent years.

We will continue to promote economic growth and development, including through our worldwide \$3.5 billion dollar food security initiative, Feed the Future, which will assist 12 African focus countries, complementing their own positive efforts under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program--CAADP.. The Obama administration is committed to working with our African partners to maximize the opportunities created by the African Growth and Opportunity Act--AGOA. We also continue to explore ways to promote African private sector growth and investment, especially for small and medium-sized businesses.

In the public health sector, we remain committed to working side-by-side with African governments and civil society to ensure that quality treatment, prevention, and care are easily accessible to communities throughout Africa. The Obama

administration has continued the PEPFAR Program and the fight against HIV/AIDS, and the President's Malaria Initiative, to combat malaria, the number one killer of children under the age of five on the continent. To meet public health challenges throughout Africa we have pledged \$63 billion in PEPFAR and other health-related funding over the next five years.

The President has demonstrated his commitment to ending armed conflict on the continent by appointing a Special Envoy, General Scott Gration, for Sudan, as well as a Special Advisor for the Great Lakes, former Congressman Howard Wolpe. The United States is proactive in working with African leaders, civil society organizations, and the international community to prevent new conflicts. We continue to provide training and equipment to African peacekeepers through ACOTA and other programs under the Global Peace Operations Initiative, and we

are committed to supporting the AU's vision of an African Peace and Security Architecture, including the African Standby Force.

We are working to help address transnational challenges by bolstering African maritime security capabilities with vessels and training, and supporting the fight against violent extremism through multi-faceted programs like the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership and the East Africa Regional Security Initiative. The United States is committed to working with Africans to find viable solutions to adapt to the severe consequences of climate change, and is working to build a sustainable, clean energy global economy.

Fifty years ago, the United States and the world saw immense potential in Africa, both in terms of its natural

resources and human capital. We still do. With the right reforms and leadership, and continued support from the international community, Africa could experience the type of change witnessed in Asia and Latin America over the past two decades.

But, as President Obama emphasized during his speech in Ghana, our policies are based on the premise that “Africa’s future is up to Africans.” Without a corresponding commitment from African leaders to enact the reforms and policies required to bring about real change, we cannot hope to achieve our shared goal of a more peaceful, prosperous, and free Africa.

Thank you.